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ABSTRACT

In response to reports that many students entering military technical training lack not only effective reading skills and cognitive learning strategies, but also demonstrate skill deficiencies in exercising personal responsibility, the Motivational Skill Training Package was developed to help students acquire and implement positive self control in learning and personal situations. To assess the effectiveness of the skills package, students (N=82) in the Air Force's Precision Measuring Equipment (PME) course participated in the motivational skill training. The seven printed, self-instructional modules, e.g., values clarification, career exploration, goal setting, stress management, and effective communication, were augmented by instructor training and small group discussions. Students completed end-of-module tests of knowledge and attitudes and a pre/post-training test. Results indicated that compared to a control group, students completing the motivational skill training had significantly higher post-training test scores on items covering training concepts, scored significantly higher on PME course tests, and had a significantly lower test failure rate. The findings suggest that training students in a variety of self-control strategies can contribute to improved performance and motivation. (JAC)

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Enhancing Student Motivation Through Positive Self-Control Strategies

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Enhancing Student Motivation Through Positive Self-Control Strategies

A growing body of theoretical and empirical literature clearly supports the view that increasing students' perceptions of personal control can increase motivation and academic achievement (e.g., Stipek, 1981; Stipek & Weisz, 1981; Thomas, 1980; Weiner, 1979, 1980), and can contribute to positive development in the direction of responsible, mature adulthood (e.g., Brown, Campione, & Day, 1981; Mischel, 1979). In addition, strategies for increasing students' perceptions of control can provide the benefit of increasing feelings of self-regard or self-respect--feelings that positively affect learning and achievement (e.g., Bower, 1981; Hettena & Ballif, 1981; Stipek, 1981; Thomas, 1980).

McCombs (in press) has reported that many students entering military technical training not only lack effective reading skills and cognitive learning strategies, but also demonstrate skill deficiencies in the area of exercising personal responsibility and self-management strategies. To remedy this problem, a thorough analysis of student skill training needs in this area, as well as treatment approaches most likely to remedy identified skill deficiencies, was undertaken (McCombs, Dobrovolny, & Lindauer, in review). The result of this analysis was the development and evaluation of a Student Motivational Skill Training Package for helping students acquire and implement a variety of strategies for taking positive self-control in learning and personal situations. Positive self-control was defined as the acceptance of personal responsibility for things one can control in learning situations and in life and the implementation of appropriate strategies and skills for taking personal control. The present study examined the effectiveness of this training package for improving the performance of military technical

training students enrolled in a self-paced, computer managed technical training course at Lowry AFB.

Method

Subjects. A total of 82 students in the Precision Measuring Equipment (PME) course participated in the motivational skill training. These students were part of a group of students entering the PME course who were randomly assigned to the second shift (noon to 6 p.m.). A comparable group of students randomly assigned to the first shift (6 a.m. to noon) formed the control group.

Measures. Two sets of measures were used to evaluate students' knowledge of concepts presented in the skill modules: end-of-module tests consisting of five knowledge items and three attitude items; and pre/post training tests consisting of 14 multiple-choice items covering the concepts of each module. Following the skill training, PME course performance date were collected in the form of students' test scores and test failure rates.

Training Materials. The Motivational Skill Training Package consists of seven printed, self-instructional modules: Introduction (to the concepts of personal responsibility and positive self-control), Values Clarification, Career Exploration, Goal Setting, Stress Management, Effective Communication, and Problem Solving. The modules are augmented by an instructor training component which helps instructors understand the concepts and strategies in the package and why these techniques promote motivation; gives them an opportunity to practice these strategies as well as techniques for helping students learn and maintain the strategies; and presents concrete guidelines for performing their role as learning strategies expert/learning facilitator.

Procedure. Ten second shift PME instructors were trained to administer the Motivational Skill Training Package. On a rotation basis, these instruc-

tors trained seven small groups of 10 to 15 students each during the evaluation period. The training sessions were structured such that students read the seven modules on their own, but at scheduled points participated in instructor-led discussions and practice sessions over each module. The total time for the training was five days, five hours per day. Once experimental group students completed the package, they began the first PME lesson, and course performance comparisons with control group students starting the course at the same time began. During the length of time possible for the evaluation, course performance data on the first two segments of the course, covering an eight-week time period, were available for analysis for portions of the total number of experimental and control students. That is, because the course is self-paced, not all students completed all performance measures during the evaluation time period.

Results

Knowledge of Concepts in Skill Package. Between 80 and 86 percent of the students completing the training package passed each module on the first attempt. On the pre/post training knowledge tests, (1) experimental and control group students did not differ significantly on any of the pretest subscales or the total scale; (2) experimental group students obtained significantly higher scores on the total posttest [$t(1,32)=2.53$, $p<.02$], on the Introduction subscale [$t(1,32)=2.25$, $p<.04$], and on the Effective Communication subscale [$t(1,32)=2.18$, $p<.04$]; and (3) differences between experimental and control group students tended to approach significance on the Goal Setting subscale [$t(1,32)=1.68$, $p<.11$] and on the Problem Solving subscale [$t(1,32)=1.93$, $p<.07$]. The majority of students in the experimental group also reported that they liked the training package, found it useful, and were willing to exert at least moderate levels of effort in learning and applying the strategies presented.

Course Performance. Analyses of student test scores indicated that experimental group students obtained significantly higher block test scores in both the first [$t(1,78)=2.05$, $p<.05$] and second [$t(1,46)=2.12$, $p<.05$] segment of the course than control group students. Experimental group students also had significantly fewer test failures than control group students [$t(1,79)=2.29$, $p<.03$].

Discussion

The evaluation findings indicate the Motivational Skill Training Package met its goal of providing relevant pre-course skill training that was both positively received and which led to improvements in the performance of PME students. Anecdotal information from students and instructors also indicated that the training contributed to higher levels of student motivation and more positive attitudes toward the PME course.

The present findings provide preliminary support for the hypothesis that training students in a variety of positive self-control strategies, tailored to particular student needs, can contribute to improved performance and motivation. More work is needed, however, in further defining and researching the relationship between positive self-control and student motivation and performance. Another fruitful research direction is the investigation of developmental implications of this concept, i.e., what are student needs and training approaches that can be most effective in enhancing positive self-control and motivation at different ages and stages of development?

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